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New York

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 24th MEETING

Chairman: Mr. MUTHAURA (Kenya)

later: Mr. HOLOHAN (Ireland)
(Vice-Chairman)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.25 p.m.

AGENDA ITEM 85: REPORT OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE ISRAELI PRACTICES AFFECTING THE HUMAN RIGHTS OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE AND OTHER ARABS OF THE OCCUPIED TERRITORIES (A/50/82-S/1995/135, A/50/159-S/1995/312, A/50/168, A/50/170, A/50/176-S/1995/376, A/50/191-S/1995/418, A/50/282, A/50/463 and A/50/657-660)

1. Mr. de SILVA (Sri Lanka), speaking as Chairman of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, introduced the twenty-seventh report of the Special Committee (A/50/463), which covered the period from 27 August 1994 to 18 August 1995 and should be considered together with the Special Committee's two periodic reports (A/50/170 and A/50/282).

2. The signing at Cairo on 4 May 1994 of the Agreement on the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area and the subsequent establishment of the Palestinian National Authority had given rise to high hopes for the improvement of the human rights situation in the occupied territories. An additional historic step in the Middle East peace process had been the signing of the Oslo II agreement in September 1995. Nevertheless, the recent assassination on 4 November 1995 of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin of Israel had threatened the peace process. Despite that deplorable event, it was encouraging that the withdrawal of Israeli military forces from the West Bank town of Jenin had proceeded as planned. Unfortunately, however, the Government of Israel had continued to refuse to cooperate with the Special Committee, denying it access to the occupied territories.

3. The Special Committee had heard the testimony of 26 persons with first-hand knowledge of the human rights situation in the occupied territories and had benefited once again from the cooperation of the Governments of Egypt, Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic and of various Palestinian representatives. Furthermore, in May 1995, the Special Committee had undertaken its customary field mission to the countries mentioned.

4. In its report, the Special Committee had tried to determine whether the positive political developments in the region had led to an improvement in the human rights situation and in the daily lives of Palestinians and other Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories. The Special Committee had concluded that the situation had not improved and had even deteriorated in many respects (A/50/463, para. 712). The repeated closures of the occupied territories, which had been imposed after serious security incidents, had entailed a significant deterioration of the economic and social situation in the occupied territories, undermined the support of the Palestinian population for the peace process and led to a significant reduction in the number of Palestinians allowed to work in Israel. In addition, the restrictions imposed on the freedom of movement of the population of the occupied territories had had adverse consequences for health, education and freedom of worship. Also, despite the arrangements for safe passage between the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area contained in the Cairo agreement, those corridors had remained closed. An equally important factor was the unabated expropriation of land, mainly for the construction of bypass roads

and the expansion of settlements, which had been accelerated after the signing of the Oslo and Cairo agreements, and was still being financed by the private sector. The Special Committee had also noted with concern the archaeological excavations in Jerusalem, which had endangered the Al-Aqsa Mosque. In addition, the severe restrictions on access to the city had seriously jeopardized the freedom of worship of both Muslims and Christians.

5. The Israeli authorities had intensified their efforts to restrict Palestinian activities in East Jerusalem. In July 1995, it had been decided not to allow any new Palestinian students from the occupied territories to study at higher educational institutions in East Jerusalem.

6. One of the principal sources of tension in the occupied territories had been the violent and aggressive behaviour of the settlers, especially in Hebron, where they had attacked Palestinians and vandalized their property, in most cases with complete impunity. Nevertheless, the overall level of violence and the number of deaths in the occupied territories had declined although the activities of undercover units had continued, including in areas under the control of the Palestinian National Authority.

7. The number of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli detention facilities remained high, and the conditions of detention had deteriorated since the signing of the Oslo and Cairo agreements. The so-called "exceptional dispensations" accorded to the general security service were a source of particular concern. During the period covered by the report, the Special Committee had continued to note deficiencies in the administration of justice, notably in the severity of sentences handed down to Palestinians in comparison with those meted out to Israelis. The inhabitants of the occupied territories had continued to be subjected to harassment of both an administrative and a physical nature from the Israeli authorities, especially at checkpoints.

8. There had been no significant change in the human rights situation in the Syrian Arab Golan, where settlement activity had been pursued. Moreover, the land and water resources of the Arab population were still being confiscated. The Special Committee hoped that the negotiations concerning the Syrian Arab Golan within the framework of the Middle East peace process would continue to progress.

9. The Special Committee welcomed several positive developments: the transfer to the Palestinians of additional responsibilities in the fields of statistics, fuel, insurance, commerce and industry, labour and local Government; the allocation of additional water resources to the inhabitants of the occupied territories; the decrease in demolition orders for houses owned by Palestinians; the increase in approvals of requests for family reunification; and the approval of a number of requests, made by Palestinians who had been expelled by the security forces before the intifadah, to return to their homes on the West Bank.

10. However, the Israeli occupation had not ended. One of the principal obstacles to peace and to the enjoyment of human rights by the whole population of the region was the continued existence of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories which were illegal under international law. The progress in the peace process must go hand in hand with full compliance by Israel with all

relevant United Nations resolutions and all universally accepted standards of human rights.

11. Finally, the Special Committee hoped that its findings would be taken into account when determining what concrete measures needed to be taken, and that its work would be seen as a positive contribution to the peace process. It was important to maintain the momentum of the peace process, in order to ensure that all parties continued to support the process and that a truly meaningful culture of respect for human rights was created, enabling all the people of the region to live together in peace, dignity, security and mutual respect.

12. Ms. ABDELHADY (Observer for Palestine) expressed her gratitude to the Chairman and to the members of the Special Committee for preparing the report (A/50/463) currently before the Committee. She regretted that it had been issued only two days before the debate and hoped that such a situation would not recur.

13. The ongoing Middle East peace process had produced many positive developments. Under the latest Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, the populated areas of the West Bank would soon be under the responsibility of the Palestinian National Authority after Israeli withdrawal from those areas. However, the Israeli army would remain in large parts of the West Bank, including the areas around the illegal Israeli settlements. As such, a situation of occupation would still exist, as did the threat of violation of human rights. It was to be deplored that difficulties and violations of human rights of Palestinians persisted in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, as a result of the restrictive and punitive policies and measures applied by Israel. Many of those measures constituted selective punishment of the Palestinian people, in violation of a number of international human rights instruments.

14. The practices of sealing or demolishing Palestinian homes, imposition of curfews and closure of areas of the occupied territories also persisted. In addition, repeated sealing and closing of the West Bank, Gaza and Jerusalem restricted freedom of movement. The Israeli practice of closing Jerusalem to Palestinians had disrupted their daily lives, since Jerusalem remained their religious, economic and cultural centre. The international community should particularly condemn that practice because it represented an Israeli attempt to confer legitimacy on the illegal annexation of Jerusalem.

15. The issue of the Palestinian detainees in Israeli prisons had not been completely resolved and remained of high concern as thousands detained in Israeli prisons were exposed to unsanitary conditions, ill treatment and harsh methods of interrogation which were tantamount to torture. All detainees should be released immediately, and such measures should cease to be applied. Another issue of grave concern was the killing of Palestinians by Israeli soldiers or secret undercover units. The illegal and violent acts of those execution squads must be stopped.

16. The Israeli authorities continued to confiscate land. To date, Israel had appropriated 33 per cent of the area of East Jerusalem, upon which 35,000 housing units had been built. In May 1995, the Security Council had convened to

consider the Israeli order to confiscate 53 hectares of land located in East Jerusalem, in flagrant violation of Security Council resolutions and of a number of international instruments. Although the Security Council had taken no action with regard to the issue, the Israeli Government soon thereafter had suspended the order, which was a positive step. Her delegation stressed the need for the complete cessation of all confiscation.

17. It was regrettable that the Israeli Government had pursued its illegal settlement construction in the occupied territory, in particular in and around Jerusalem, as part of the Government's plan for a "Greater Jerusalem". As stated in the Special Committee's report, settler behaviour had become more violent and aggressive during the period under review. The policy of land confiscation and the campaign of settler colonialism were considered by her delegation to be among the most serious of the Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people, in view of their consequences. Therefore, they could not continue in the new era, since they were clearly not compatible with the peace process and represented a grave threat to its success.

18. While the Declaration of Principles of Interim Self-Government Arrangements had postponed negotiation on various important issues, including that of the settlements, the position of Palestine or of the international community in that regard had not changed, nor should illegal settlements continue. It was imperative that the Israeli Government should accept the de jure applicability of the Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War of 12 August 1949 to the entire occupied Palestinian territory, including Jerusalem, and should declare its readiness to abide by the provisions of that Convention.

19. Her delegation expressed its regret regarding the refusal of the Israeli authorities to cooperate with the Special Committee, believing that the current situation warranted the continued work of the Committee, and she hoped that the report for the following year would reflect further progress and positive change on the ground.

20. Mr. PÉREZ GRIFFO (Spain), speaking on behalf of the European Union, Slovakia, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Romania regarding the assassination of Mr. Yitzhak Rabin, Prime Minister of Israel, said that such terrorist attacks could not be permitted to stand in the way of the peace process in the region. The signature on 28 September 1995 of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, represented a milestone in the peace process between Israel and the Palestinian people. The long process that had begun with the Madrid Conference in 1991 must continue. The European Union welcomed the withdrawal of Israeli security forces from Jenin and hoped that the same course would be followed in Tulkarm, Nablus, Qalquiliya, Bethlehem, Ramallah and Hebron. It also commended the recent release of political prisoners by both parties, and urged the Israeli Government to proceed along that course. The European Union hoped that the various bodies and committees devoted to the Palestinian question would contribute in an active and positive manner to developing the peace process. The implementation of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip would obviate the need for the Special Committee.

21. The European Union was determined to fulfil its commitments regarding economic and social support for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The European Union confirmed its commitment to the Middle East process and, in particular to a just, global and lasting solution to the Palestinian question, and to the Arab-Israeli conflict as a whole, based on appropriate resolutions by the Security Council, within the context of the precepts of international law. In the peace process, both parties could rely on the active, constructive and impartial support of the European Union in making it possible for all inhabitants of the region, and of the occupied territories in particular, to enjoy the full and unconditional exercise of their rights.

22. Mr. HOLOHAN (Ireland) took the Chair.

23. Mr. NAKAMURA (Japan) expressed his condolences regarding the assassination of Mr. Yitzhak Rabin and said that he hoped that the Israeli people would maintain their commitment to the peace process. Japan welcomed the agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, in particular the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, and commended the parties involved for their efforts. Japan hoped that the interim self-government of the Palestinian Authority would prove effective, and that progress would be made in the negotiations between Israel and Syria, and between Israel and Lebanon, so that comprehensive peace could be achieved in the region.

24. With the expansion of Palestinian interim self-government, the next urgent task was to improve infrastructure, public health, and educational and housing facilities, particularly in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Japan would continue to extend assistance to the peace process in recognition of the fact that economic independence and the creation of employment opportunities for the Palestinian people were vital to ensuring social stability.

25. Japan welcomed the fact that the agreement reached between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization contained provisions on gradual release of political prisoners. Japan hoped that the Israelis and the Palestinians would overcome the psychological obstacles that had resulted from the occupation of the territories, and would establish cooperative relations based on mutual trust. Japan supported the resolutions on the situation in the occupied territories adopted over the course of many years and commended the progress achieved by the Palestinians, Israelis and Jordanians, in the belief that they would be conducive to the achievement of comprehensive and lasting peace throughout the Middle East.

26. Mr. AL-ATTAR (Syrian Arab Republic) said that the report before the Committee (A/50/463) demonstrated that peace had not yet been achieved despite the signature of bilateral agreements, that the occupation of Arab lands continued and that oppressive Israeli practices were escalating daily. The Israeli occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights had been accompanied by the introduction of legislation and measures to eliminate the identity of lands and of the people through Judaization. There had been no let-up in the series of annexations, colonization, expropriation of land, detentions and assassinations.

27. In recent years, Israel had violated all international standards by endeavouring to colonize and Judaize the Golan Heights. It had destroyed Arab

centres and monuments, places of worship and schools; it had expropriated lands and taken control of water resources, thereby undermining agriculture and livestock-rearing activities in the Golan Heights. Under their policy of Judaizing a great part of the occupied Syrian Golan Heights and annexing it to Israel, the Israeli occupation authorities had drawn up laws under which any land not occupied by a person would be considered the property of the occupying authorities. It had also expropriated large tracts of land under the so-called "absenteeism legislation", thereby taking possession of 85 per cent of the surface area of the Golan Heights, in contravention of international law and United Nations resolutions. The number of settlers armed by the Israeli army exceeded 30,000.

28. Resistance to foreign occupation was a legitimate right enshrined in the United Nations Charter and recognized in international instruments. The intifadah in the Golan Heights would end only with Israel's total withdrawal. His delegation shared the concern expressed by the Special Committee regarding the continued violation by Israel of the human rights of the inhabitants of the occupied Arab territories. It supported the appeal that urgent measures should be taken to guarantee protection of human rights and fundamental liberties of those inhabitants. Occupation, per se, constituted a violation of human rights.

29. He wondered about the outcome of the peace process and about its future, including the future of the principle of land for peace. Despite the obstacles raised by Israel, the Syrian Arab Republic, which had actively promoted peace since the Madrid Conference, was open to the establishment of a fair and comprehensive peace which guaranteed Israel's total withdrawal from the Golan Heights and the other occupied territories, in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 425 (1978), in conformity with the principle of land for peace. However, far from creating an atmosphere conducive to establishing peace in the region, Israel continued to violate the freedom of the Arab inhabitants and to attempt to seize their land. The situation should be monitored by the international community and by the Special Committee. The Syrian Arab Republic considered the task entrusted to the Special Committee to be a proper one, and was prepared to continue to cooperate with it in order to publicize human rights violations in the occupied Arab territories until the region had come to enjoy a just and comprehensive peace.

30. Mr. AL-GHAMDI (Saudi Arabia) stressed the importance of the reports of the Special Committee, which denounced the ongoing campaigns of repression and arrests perpetrated by the occupying authorities against the citizens of the occupied territories, the expropriation of land for the purpose of establishing and expanding settlements, and the repeated closures of the Gaza Strip and the Jericho Area. All of those activities had a negative impact on the socio-economic situation of the Palestinian people and the Arab inhabitants of the occupied territories, on confidence-building and, consequently, on the peace process. That process should in principle be directed towards the restoration of the legitimate rights and sovereignty of the Palestinians, the withdrawal of Israel from all of the occupied territories and the creation of an independent State.

31. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had always welcomed the positive developments which had taken place in the region, participated in the multilateral

discussions and fulfilled its financial commitments with regard to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. It was aware that those efforts required good will and great sacrifices. He expressed his Government's consternation at the acts perpetrated by Israel in Islamic places of worship in Jerusalem and Hebron and its constant attempts to legitimize activities which constituted violations of international resolutions. Moreover, such acts, particularly those involving the city of Jerusalem, complicated the situation and might impede the peace process, given the importance of that city for Muslims. He also noted the serious situation which existed in the occupied Syrian Arab Golan and in southern Lebanon as a result of the occupation and the pressures exerted by Israel for the purpose of creating new conditions which might slow the peace process in that region.

32. The recent events associated with the peace process and resulting from the signing in Washington of the Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, had made it possible to entertain the hope that peace and security might some day reign in the Middle East and that all parties might work towards the well-being and prosperity of all the peoples of the region. To that end, peace-loving States must urge Israel to put an end to its current practices and to work to regain the confidence of neighbouring countries and promote the peace process. It was to be hoped that tangible progress would be achieved, including the total withdrawal of Israel from the Syrian Arab Golan, southern Lebanon and the other occupied territories in accordance with the relevant resolutions and the application of the principle of land for peace.

33. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia felt that the solution to the refugee problem, namely the return of the refugees to their land, would serve as the basis for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. Similarly, Israel's compliance with the relevant resolutions and with international treaties and conventions, especially those relating to the non-proliferation of nuclear arms, would lead to conditions conducive to peace and stability so that the peoples of the Middle East could devote themselves to the socio-economic development of the region and restore it to what it had once been, a cultural centre and an oasis of creativity and progress.

34. Mr. ELARABY (Egypt) said that the issues of Palestine and the Middle East, which had from the outset captured the attention of the international community, had now become a priority owing to the progress achieved in the negotiations and particularly as a result of the signing of the Declaration of Principles on Provisions on Interim Self-Government Arrangements (A/48/486-S/26560, annex) and of the administrative agreements concluded between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Israel on the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. The Interim Agreement, signed in Washington on 28 September 1995, provided for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Arab towns. That would lead to the holding of elections and pave the way for negotiations on the definitive status of those territories which, it was to be hoped, would put an end to the Israeli occupation and lay the foundations for the political stability of the Palestinian people in its national territory. He also noted that there had been progress in relations with Jordan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Lebanon.

35. Those events constituted a radical change in the nature of the Arab-Israeli conflict. All of the parties concerned had agreed to act in accordance with the

provisions of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which provided for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from all of the territories which had been occupied since 1967 and for the establishment of good relations between the parties. It had been recognized that the Palestinian people must be able to exercise its legitimate rights after its liberation. However, despite those encouraging developments, it was important to bear in mind the potential threats to the peace process as demonstrated by the tragic assassination of the Prime Minister of Israel. The enemies of peace would resort to violence to the utmost extent in order to attain their ends. The entire international community must express its opposition to the atrocities which were being committed. It was to be hoped that the Government of Israel would fulfil the commitments which it had made in signing the agreements with Palestine. An acceleration of the peace process was the best possible response to those who wished to delay it.

36. The withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip and Jericho had been perhaps the most significant advance in the peace process. Since the military occupation was in itself a violation of human rights, the fact that the Palestinian Authority already governed some territories took on even greater significance. However, Israel continued to act against the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War and other international conventions. The Israeli settlements were causing tension and instability in the occupied territories. Although Israel was not providing financial support for the expansion of the settlements, that did not prevent the private sector from doing so. Another serious factor was the impunity with which certain settlers were acting. The massacre at the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron was a tragic example of how the actions of extremists who sought to undermine the peace process and foment hatred were tolerated.

37. The current period of transition called for new confidence-building measures aimed at securing acceptance of the principles of peaceful coexistence. For that reason, his delegation urged Israel to cease the practices mentioned in the report of the Special Committee, in particular the closing of the territories for long periods which so greatly aggravated the serious economic situation of the Palestinians. It also called on donor States to fulfil their obligations and to help the Palestinian Authority improve the standard of living of the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

38. Mr. BATAINEH (Jordan) said that his delegation, in joining the discussion on the item under consideration, was seeking to contribute to the peace process, which was directed towards safeguarding the well-being of the Palestinian people and protecting its human rights as well as promoting mutual confidence among peoples and laying the basis for a just and comprehensive peace.

39. The important measures adopted in accordance with Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) and the results of the negotiations on putting an end to the occupation and recognizing the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people had brought about positive change and had generally lowered the level of violence. The twenty-seventh report of the Special Committee showed, however, that the situation in the occupied territories remained critical and that the occupying Power was still violating its commitments under the fourth Geneva Convention and other relevant agreements. His delegation agreed with the views expressed in the report regarding the exacerbation of the

situation, which was clear from the continuing closures of the occupied territories as a result of incidents provoked by extremists on both sides opposed to the peace process. Such closures and the concomitant restrictions on freedom of movement for Palestinians aggravated the economic situation in the territories. The population was being punished collectively for actions of a few people.

40. The presence of Israeli settlements on the West Bank, including Jerusalem, and in the other occupied territories continued to create tension. The Government of Israel supported the expansion of the settlements through the private sector, which meant that land was expropriated in order to create corridors of communication between them. The expropriation orders that were used had generally run out more than 10 years previously. If the plans to expropriate land and expand the settlements in Jerusalem were carried out, those settlements would extend as far as Jericho, which would lead to the Palestinian people in the outskirts of Jerusalem becoming isolated. At the same time, the settlers were adopting an increasingly hostile attitude, which was made worse by the connivance of the authorities. The Government of Israel therefore had a special responsibility to bring its policy into line with the norms of international law, United Nations resolutions and the spirit of the peace process.

41. Despite the progress that had been made, there were constant developments running counter to the wish of the international community to achieve a just and comprehensive solution and promote confidence. Israel remained hostile to the activities of Palestinian institutions, particularly in Jerusalem, and had even closed some of them down. There was no doubt that the sooner power was transferred to the Palestinian Authority the more positive the effect would be from the social, economic and human rights point of view. The peace process should lead to complete compliance with internationally accepted human rights standards.

42. The question of Israeli practices that affected the human rights of the Palestinian people in the occupied territories was inseparable from the question of Palestine. The fundamental and definitive way of dealing with the question of Israeli practices was therefore to find a just and comprehensive solution to all aspects of the question of Palestine, thus bringing the occupation to an end and enabling the Palestinian people to decide its own future in its own land. It was essential for all the parties to the conflict to pursue the peace process and recognize the need to find a just and comprehensive solution through peaceful means so that the region could embark on a new era of peace, security, stability and progress.

43. Mr. DOUDECH (Tunisia) regretted the situation that obtained in the occupied territories as a result of the measures that Israel continued to apply against the inhabitants of those territories, despite the agreements that had been reached. Moreover, the situation had been exacerbated by the acts of harassment that the settlers were perpetrating with impunity against the Palestinians.

44. If the peace process was to be brought to a successful conclusion, Israel would have to comply with the provisions of the fourth Geneva Convention and other international human rights instruments. Only thus would it earn the

confidence of the Arabs in the occupied territories and persuade them to support the peace process. Full implementation of the agreement on extending the autonomy of the territories, signed with the Israeli Government by the Palestinian Authority was, however, essential to enable the Palestinian people to hold elections at the stipulated time.

45. His delegation was of the view that as long as the territories remained occupied and the settlements problem was not resolved it was essential to renew the Special Committee's mandate. He cherished the hope, however, that the parties would continue their efforts to ensure that the Middle East would enjoy peace, progress and security.

46. Mr. SHAKED (Israel) said that although a mere two years had passed since the signing of the Declaration of Principles by Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the political atmosphere of the Middle East had undergone a dramatic change. Major steps towards reconciliation had been undertaken by Israel, the Palestinians and several other States of the region. The Middle East/North Africa Economic Summit held in Casablanca in 1994 and that held in Amman in 1995 had opened new avenues for regional economic cooperation, given new impetus to private investment in the Middle East and paved the way for the establishment of regional economic institutions. That process would be continued with the holding of the economic conference in Cairo in 1996. If the economic development of the whole Middle East could be fostered, the chances for the success of the peace process in the region would be greatly enhanced. In addition to the economic dimension, it was imperative to remember that Israel had already begun to create a new political reality in the West Bank and the Israeli Government hoped that by the end of 1995 no Palestinian would remain under its control in that territory.

47. The Special Political and Decolonization Committee (Fourth Committee) should note that certain resolutions adopted when the Arab-Israeli conflict was at its height did not reflect the new reality in the Middle East. Israel also considered that the Special Committee wasted the limited financial resources of the United Nations without bringing any benefit at all to the Palestinian people.

48. There were several ways in which the United Nations could contribute to the Middle East peace process. First, by completing the process, started in previous sessions of the General Assembly, of bringing its resolutions into line with the new reality in the Middle East; secondly, by not renewing the mandate of the Special Committee, but looking instead into the possibility of directing its budget to specific urgent needs of the Palestinian Authority; thirdly, by coordinating and strengthening its assistance to the Palestinian people; and, fourthly, by creating a more supportive atmosphere through recognition that there was no place for one-sided criticisms and polemics at a time of fruitful dialogue and significant steps towards peace in the region.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.